



US Army Corps
of Engineers
New England District

South Shore Habitat Restoration Project

Army Corps of Engineers Coastal Resources Management Council



The Rhode Island South Shore Habitat Restoration Project is the result of a resolution adopted by the U.S. Congressional Committee on the Environment and Public Works of the U.S. Senate on August 2, 1995 and funded by Congress in fiscal year 1997.

The issues that led to the creation of this Project are well-known in South County: Sedimentation basins, designed to trap sand as it surges through the three breachways, have not been adequately maintained since breachway construction. Tidal sand deltas have formed inside the breachways. The shifting sand has killed aquatic vegetation that once sustained fertile fish and shellfish breeding areas.

The purpose of the congressional resolution was to determine the need for improved flood control, frontal erosion, coastal storm damage reduction, and watershed, stream and ecosystem habitat viability in the area from Watch Hill (Westerly) Rhode Island to Narragansett, Rhode Island. The federal sponsor for the project is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE).

Initial scoping meetings focused in on environmental restoration for the investigation and three major areas were agreed upon:

- C Dredge the breachways and tidal deltas to remove sediment and restore eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) habitat. Use the dredged material (as appropriate) to improve Piping Plover habitat on the barrier beaches.
- C Salt marsh restoration on Quonochontaug Pond (east of West Beach Road)
- C Fish passage restoration in Cross Mills stream and Factory Pond brook.

From these scoping meetings came the following Project Goals and Objectives.

Selectively restore once productive, now damaged, habitats in the breachway tidal deltas of Ninigret, Quonochontaug and Winnapaug Ponds using a combination of choices that include planting, seeding and sand removal.

To restore, as well, fish passage in the salt pond tributaries leading to Cross Mills Pond and Factory Pond.

When the restoration is complete, there will be newly planted eelgrass beds where they existed before the sand from poorly maintained breachways buried them. This new vegetation will promote the return of greater numbers of valued fish and shellfish than have been seen in recent years. They, in turn, will generate more robust fisheries and healthier salt ponds along the Rhode Island south shore.

The project has four phases: a Reconnaissance Study, a Feasibility Study, an Implementation Phase and Operation and Maintenance.

The Reconnaissance Phase was completed in June 98. During this phase it was determined that selective dredging and planting will have a beneficial effect on tidal delta habitats and fish passage will benefit anadromous fish.

The Feasibility Phase is ending (April 2002) and is soliciting public comment. Researchers are studying all aspects of tidal delta evolution and habitat alteration, the value of present habitats and the impacts those restoration alternatives might have on these existing habitats. Selection of areas to be restored and alternatives to be used are determined in this phase. Fish passage engineering designs are completed.

The Restoration (Implementation) Phase will begin, where it is projected to be beneficial, using differing combinations of dredging, planting and seeding at each site. The state must commit funding for a long term breachway maintenance plan before any restoration work begins. The restoration phase is expected to take about two years.

The Operation and Maintenance Phase begins immediately after restoration and is the long-term responsibility of the State.

The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), as the non-governmental sponsor has been cooperating with the ACOE, the towns, the University of Rhode Island and the legislature throughout the process.

The **Project Managers** are the Coastal Resources Management Council and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Our **Project Sponsors** are the State of Rhode Island, ACOE, CRMC, RI Department of Environmental Management, and the Towns of Westerly, Charlestown & South Kingstown.

Our **Project Partners** are the ACOE, CRMC, RIDEM, URI/GSO, URI Geology Dept., URI Dept. of Natural Resource Sciences, RI Sea Grant, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, NOAA Restoration, National Marine Fisheries Service, USEPA, and the Salt Ponds Coalition.

Funding has come from the Army Corps of Engineers (which will pay for 50% to 65% of the costs depending on the phase), while the remainder has come from the State of Rhode Island and the Towns of Charlestown, South Kingstown and Westerly.

Contacts:

Janet Freedman, CRMC
Jeff Willis, CRMC

(401)783-3370
(401)783-3370

j_freedman@crmc.state.ri.us
j_willis@crmc.state.ri.us

*This fact sheet was prepared by the Salt Ponds Coalition for the
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